

United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Region 5
Office of Public Affairs
230 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Illinois, Indiana,
Michigan, Minnesota,
Ohio, Wisconsin



FACT SHEET

EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



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U.S. SCRAP, CHICAGO IL
Fact Sheet

October 1985

What is the
status of
the underground
fire?

A fire smoldering beneath the site at 122nd St. and Cottage Grove Ave. in Chicago was first reported to U.S. EPA on August 16, 1985. Since that time, the agency has used emergency funds from the Superfund program to attempt to stop the fire, and to closely monitor the situation. Clay caps installed over "hot spots" seem to be successfully cutting off the oxygen supply to the fire.

125 temperature probes inserted throughout the site are sampled twice a day. This data shows the temperatures dropping. EPA will continue to monitor and track the fire and take new measures if necessary.

What about
buried
material?

EPA has received reports that there are drums buried on the east side of the Missouri Pacific Railroad Embankment on the west border of the site.

The exact contents of the drums are unknown, but they may contain shock sensitive materials. This means they may be extremely sensitive to heat or motion and that handling must be kept to a minimum. If the contents are disturbed, it is possible they could explode.

What will be
done about
the drums?

U.S. EPA, in consultation with the city of Chicago has concluded that any shock sensitive waste should be detonated on site. This will be safer than transporting the drums to a disposal site. Leaving the drums as they are on the site also is too risky because many shock sensitive materials become more sensitive with age.

How will that
work?

First, each drum will be unearthed using a special drum ungrappler intended for use with hazardous materials. Each drum will be opened and the contents will be identified to determine whether it contains shock sensitive material. Material that is not shock sensitive will be repackaged and sent to a licensed hazardous waste landfill or incinerator.

The shock sensitive material will be isolated on the site in a specially constructed berm, or enclosed area, made out of clay.

The material will be detonated in small amounts (up to five gallons at a time). EPA estimates it will take a minimum of four to six weeks to remove the drums, separate out the non-shock sensitive material and detonate the shock sensitive material using these methodical procedures.

Are residents
in any danger?

No. The drums will be detonated in a controlled environment. The maximum range the detonations could affect is about 100 feet. Nearby residents may hear the noise, but there shouldn't be other effects on the surrounding area.

To be sure, intensive air monitoring will be conducted throughout the detonations. In addition, the Chicago Fire Department has an evacuation plan prepared in case there are fumes or a fire. The fire department will be on-site during drum removal so it can respond instantly if an unexpected incident occurs.

EPA has coordinated with local fire, police and emergency services to be sure all contingencies are considered.

What about
other safety
measures?

The workers, of course, will use specialized equipment and wear highly protective clothing throughout the procedures. There is no need for nearby residents to take extra precautions.

How do you
know this
will work?

Detonating this type of material is an accepted practice. It has been used safely and successfully at many locations, including East St. Louis, IL.

Who will do
the work?

A firm which is experienced and licensed in these detonation procedures will conduct the work under the supervision of a U.S. EPA on-scene coordinator.

What happens
next?

EPA will be conducting a detailed study of the site to determine whether there is a need for additional emergency work at the site. The second purpose is to collect information to see whether the site may be eligible for the National Priorities List (NPL). NPL sites can receive funds for long term investigation and cleanup of situations that may pose potential environmental or health problems (as opposed to immediate threats, such as the fire or the drums, which can be handled using emergency funds.) The study will include sampling of the soil, water and air on the site.

More
Information

U.S. EPA has established a repository for information on the site at the Pullman branch of the Chicago Public Library at 1101 S. Indiana Ave. This file will be updated as reports or information becomes available. In addition, the agency will issue a status report each week while the shock sensitive material is being destroyed. This report will be mailed to the library, the district fire station, police station and media.

If you need additional information, please contact:

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